

BOOK FORUM: EDWARD WEISBAND, *THE MACABRESQUE: HUMAN VIOLATION AND HATE IN GENOCIDE, MASS ATROCITY AND ENEMY-MAKING* (OXFORD: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2017)

## Everywhere the Same, yet Different

**The Macabresque: Human Violation and Hate in Genocide, Mass Atrocity and Enemy-making**, by Edward Weisband, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2017, 480 pp., USD\$44.95 (hardcover), ISBN 9780190677886

“The linkages between violence and spectacle extend back to biblical and classical times and even before that, to the cultures of prerecorded history. The contemporary digital world has become too familiar with media display of graphic violence.”<sup>1</sup> Edward Weisband’s book launches with an ambitious project. By approaching the twentieth century in a long-durée and transnational perspective, the political scientist draws attention to a neglected issue in the study of genocide and mass violence: performativity, or the staging, dramaturgy, and aesthetics of human violation. Weisband makes excellent use of psychological theory and qualitative psychological analysis. His book offers us a fascinating voyage into the mind of perpetrators.

Weisband’s methodological and theoretical diversity and his incisive argumentation make it a stimulating, but also very dense reading experience. Since it is impossible to do justice to the intellectual breadth of this work in a few pages, my commentary will draw upon my own fields of expertise and concentrate on Nazism, the Holocaust, and sexual violence in armed conflict. Reading Weisband’s work, three topics of discussion stood out for me: the visual, the everyday, and gender.

Before I start, it is useful to point out that I come from a different disciplinary background: instead of political theory, I do historical empirical case studies, paying attention to the materiality of sources and the fluid, subjective realities that I re- and de-construct with close reading. Hence, while Weisband and I each observe extreme violence, we do so through quite different lenses, allowing us to grasp different phenomena on different scales. That said, we both investigate the impact of sociodynamics on perpetrators, asking how the political-ideological environment and the perpetrator’s mindset inform one another and shape the situation.

## Epistemologies of the Visual

One of the most welcome and path-breaking facets of Weisband’s work lies in the fact that he takes performativity in transgression *seriously*. With the concept of macabresque, which characterizes the exhibitionist revelling of perpetrators in the orchestrated suffering of their victims (57), the author introduces an auspicious concept that allows a truly transdisciplinary approach, interweaving psychology, cultural theory, history and social sciences. By looking in depth at performative violent transgressions, Weisband offers a promising take on the question of why the act of killing alone is insufficient to gratify perpetrators. As he compellingly demonstrates with a variety of examples, the “allure” of these transgressions lies in the social, symbolic, cultural, and psycho-emotional “benefits” and “compensations” that the perpetrators draw from their cruel performances.

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Weisband, *Macabresque. Human Violation and Hate in Genocide, Mass Atrocity, and Enemy-making* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2018), 3.

The question of why the macabresque appears and reappears throughout history and societies (253) is, in my opinion, key and utterly challenging. Weisband opts for seven twentieth-century case studies of human violation: the Armenian genocide, Stalin's Purges, Nazi eugenics and racism, the Rwandan genocide, the Cambodian genocide, torture in Argentina, and Serbian ethnic cleansing in the Yugoslav war. Throughout the book, therefore, the reader encounters a great deal of information and literature. However, the fact that the author seldom indicates his evidence and data complicates the reading process. It is often difficult to debate with Weisband's work, since the argumentation and case studies mainly draw upon psychological and sociological studies or political analysis. Rarely do we see what types of evidence these scholars use to build their case or theory. As a reader and as a historian, I would have appreciated more detailed references to sources.

What particularly puzzled me was the absence of references to visual sources. Since the macabresque is a transgressive performance of violence, acted by humans on other human bodies in space and time, I wonder why Weisband chose to exclude images and the imaginary. Drawings by survivors, photographs taken by perpetrators, or audio-visual material are part of the collective memory and thus would have offered a great opportunity to "connect" the readers to the topic. In addition, the dimension of the visual opens up interesting epistemological discussions. Instead, it appears that the research literature Weisband mobilizes relies exclusively on first- or second-hand testimonies.

Why are we – here I include my fellow historian colleagues – paying so much attention to words when during mass violence, killers seldom speak, write, or reflect upon their violent acts? The testimonies we have from Nazi perpetrators are mostly sworn or written statements provided for juridical investigations or post-war trials.<sup>2</sup> Such post-conflict statements have a number of flaws: Nazi killers and torturers are often less eloquent than their victims, while the risk of legal trouble further restrains their explanations. Perpetrator studies therefore rely on survivor's testimonies, which give us an indispensable inside view on the killing fields and camps. We cannot, however, fully grasp the dynamics and dramaturgies of transgressive violence from the perspective of the victims alone.

Photographic images shot by the perpetrators in action are, despite their elusive complexity, rare instances where we clearly perceive the perpetrator's perspective. Since the invention of the photographic camera, combatants have captured their experiences of war and violence in images, as Susan Sontag has convincingly argued.<sup>3</sup> Whereas the act of human violation often becomes obsolete once executed, these shock-pictures of violence, cruelty, and death grant us crucial knowledge about the torturers and what we might call a culture of cruelty. Often evil-doers cannot recall or describe what they did or felt and why they did it. But the photographs they shot document what Weisband rightly frames as the voyeuristic desire to bond with each other through self-exhibitionism and desecration (65). Hence "trophy selfies," as I call them, allow us glimpses of intimate practices of violence and peer group dynamics within a specific historical, geographical, and political context.

In a recent article, I have tried to make sense of an anonymous rape photograph where a group of fifteen Germans mock-rape an unidentified and unidentifiable woman who may or may not be dead.<sup>4</sup> Particularly on the Eastern front, where this rape mockery presumably took place, the German army command made no effort to prevent sexual violence, instead

<sup>2</sup> Elissa Mailänder, *Female SS Guards and Workaday Violence: The Majdanek Concentration Camp, 1942–1944* (Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2015), 13–22.

<sup>3</sup> Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of the Others* (New York: Picador, 2003), 24.

<sup>4</sup> Elissa Mailänder, "Making Sense of a Rape Photograph: Sexual Violence as Social Performance on the Eastern Front, 1939–1944," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 26, no. 3 (2017): 489–520.

facilitating it as a marker of conquest and annihilation.<sup>5</sup> Atrocity selfies thus give us the chance to observe the participants and the different ways they engaged in the macabresque “joke,” which also opens a window to study the power dynamics at play between men. It is precisely the subjective, uncertain characteristics of these photographs – what the viewers (contemporary and future) *see in it* – that are epistemologically interesting.

More than any spoken language, violent gestures are a universal form of communication, a “crude *lingua franca*.”<sup>6</sup> Yet, when it comes to “mutilated messengers,” not just any body will do, as archeologist Maud Gleason cautions. Gleason’s brilliant article about the semiotics of body language in a time “where political leaders had to control crowds without the aid of tear gas or public address systems,”<sup>7</sup> is quite eye opening. As a scholar of Greek and Roman literature and history, accustomed to dealing with fragmentary textual and visual traces, she explores mentalities behind gestures and words. Her argument that people constantly used the bodies of others to send messages and that these bodies became “semiotic instruments” of self-expression, also applies to the twentieth-century stylized performance of human violation.

Exhibitionist trophy selfies hence allow us to investigate the overarching cultural, social, and political meanings of human violation, while also helping us to gain some further insight into the perpetrators’ mindset. In his psychoanalytical reading of the situational, Weisband integrates the emotional texture (euphoria, cynicism, hatred, ecstasy, 29-40) with the social dynamics (empowerment, domination, subjugation, display patterns, 43-50). It would be extremely interesting to apply this approach to visual sources. A particularly intriguing issue Weisband raises is the question of the humorous aspect in human violation. From an analytical and ethical meta perspective, I share Weisband’s premise that the macabresque aesthetics of transgressive violation are a form of “derisive ‘non-humor’ seething with acidic ‘non-irony’ as an accomplishment to sadistic cruelty” (57). At the same time, I wonder if classifying mocking violations as “delusions of the disordered will” (76, 77) isn’t a form of moral “arrogance” that fails to capture and acknowledge the pleasure and “fun” of violence and transgression in a particular situation and specific society. Even though I defend the morally radical conclusion that there is no “out-group” in performative acts of extreme violence – a shared transgressive violation affects the group as a whole, making it an important and powerful moment of bonding – I also strongly advocate taking the perpetrator’s “work logic,” “ethics,” and “humor” seriously.

## The Banalities of Transgressive Violence

“The answer to why ‘ordinary’ men kill lies in *how* they kill,” Weisband posits (74), and I could not agree more with this argument. The point is not to prioritize structure and setting over motivation or ideology, but to link transgressive violence back to an individual trajectory and the psychodynamics at stake. Nazism and concentration camps play a significant role in the first and second part of the book, where Weisband elaborates his Lacanian reading of sadistic cruelty. This psychoanalytical analysis would have profited, however, from recent historical literature on Nazi violence in general, and concentration camps in particular. It would have allowed him to include the role of everyday socio-cultural practices and institutional structures in order to better grasp the motivations and mindset of the perpetrators in their moment of

<sup>5</sup> Regina Mühlhäuser, “Reframing Sexual Violence as a Weapon and Strategy of War: The Case of the German Wehrmacht during the War and Genocide in the Soviet Union, 1941–1944,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 26, no. 3 (2017): 366–401.

<sup>6</sup> Maud Gleason, “Mutilated Messengers: body language in Josephus,” in *Being Greek Under Rome: Cultural Identity, the Second Sophistic and the Development of Empire*, ed. Simon Goldhill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 66, 83.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

action. These aspects are especially important, since we know very little about Nazi perpetrators' family environments and socialization (100-104). "Ordinary" perpetrators, by which I mean people who had elementary schooling and were socialized in working families, wrote little during their camp service.<sup>8</sup> Post-war trials forced these former SS personnel to take a public stand, but their depositions remain fragmentary.

The example of the Auschwitz head of the crematorium, Otto Moll, who was notorious for his cruelty, is a good case in point.<sup>9</sup> In charge of disposing of the corpses of murdered Jews, he made himself a master of life and death, staging apocalyptic games where he forced female inmates in particular to face their own deaths in horror and shame, before they were killed.<sup>10</sup> Yet as sociologist Patrick Bruneteaux and I have argued, neither Sossky's circular notion of "absolute power" nor psychological readings of sadism (122) fully capture the emotional, social, cultural, and historical significance of these spectacles of sadistic and cruel transgression. Weisband's sub-chapter on "humiliation games" (345), where he links perpetrators' interior shame with their externalized projection of shame-rage, offers an interesting take on Moll's sadism. At the same time, we cannot neglect his professional and personal background. To piece together a fuller understanding of these perpetrators, then, we must examine the materiality of the everyday. Their personal and professional trajectories shed considerable light on how they became killers.

It is important, for instance, that Moll came from a working-class family and left school at fourteen to train as a gardener.<sup>11</sup> It is equally important that Moll left his job in 1933 to join the Nazi Reich Labor Service, where he completed his first paramilitary training and became a group leader (*Truppführer*) before joining the fifth SS unit *Totenkopf-Sturmbann Brandenburg* in 1935. Finally, the fact that he suffered serious head trauma and lost sight in his right eye in a truck crash in 1937 plays a significant role, because it made Moll suddenly unfit for work. The then unmarried 22-year-old was forced to leave the military corps of the SS; instead, he was assigned to the Sachsenhausen camp gardens where he exercised a civilian profession he had fled. Now Moll was in daily contact with the inmates; it might be no coincidence that Moll's first excesses of violence towards prisoners came at precisely this moment. When transferred with his family to Auschwitz in May 1941, he was appointed to the agricultural service, but commander Rudolf Höss saw potential in this reckless man and put him in charge of the Punitive Unit (*Strafkompanie*) and later made him head of the *Sonderkommandos*. Here Moll invented a crematory technique over open ditches that fed the fire pits for 24 to 36 hours without interruption.<sup>12</sup> It was in this precise environment that Moll discovered his talent as a specialist of cremation and as a macabre master of ceremony. His socialization, in short, played a key role in his future "career" as inventive perpetrator.

Not only do perpetrators have a trajectory; each camp also has its own history and genealogy (Michel Foucault), aspects that are overlooked in Weisband's more psychologically and psychoanalytically-oriented analysis.<sup>13</sup> Seen from this historical and political perspective, the

<sup>8</sup> Only higher SS-officers, notably Rudolf Höss, sketched memoirs after the defeat. Rudolf Höss, *Commandant of Auschwitz: The Autobiography of Rudolf Hoess* (Cleveland, OH: World Pub. Co., 1959).

<sup>9</sup> Filip Müller, *Eyewitness Auschwitz: Three Years in the Gas Chambers at Auschwitz* (New York: Stein and Day, 1979).

<sup>10</sup> Patrick Bruneteaux and Elissa Mailänder, "Les violences concentrationnaires au prisme de la cruauté (1933-1945): le cas d'Otto Moll," *Histoire@Politique*, no. 26 (May-August 2015), <https://www.cairn.info/revue-histoire-politique-2015-2-page-47.htm>.

<sup>11</sup> Bundesarchiv (BArch), RS former BDC, Moll, Otto. 4.3.1915.

<sup>12</sup> Elissa Mailänder, "A Specialist: The Daily Work of Ehrich Muhsfeldt, Chief of the Crematorium at Majdanek Concentration and Extermination camp, 1942-44," in *Destruction and Human Remains. Disposal and Concealment in Genocide and Mass Violence*, ed. Elisabeth Anstett and Jean-Marc Dreyfus (Manchester: Manchester University Press 2014), 46-68.

<sup>13</sup> See Nikolaus Wachsmann, *KL: A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015). Wolfgang Sofsky's path-breaking study is biased in this regard since he deals with a sociological model camp that

camps acted as a systematic tool, first to persecute political opponents and later to engage in a major genocidal project. Christopher Dillon has offered a fascinating insight into the construction of what became the first “proper” SS-run camp.<sup>14</sup> Dachau had existed since February 1933 but very few of the initial staff of drunken old fighters (*Alte Kämpfer*) stayed in charge when in 1934 Himmler hired Theodor Eicke, an unemployed former psychiatric patient who had been kicked out of the SS, to restructure the camp. Eicke standardized the employment of drills and violence in Dachau, which became the blueprint for all subsequent concentration camps. Dillon foregrounds how the social profile, as well as the working standards and self-perception of the SS, changed considerably over time.

Numerous guards, including Höss, trained in the so-called Dachau School in 1934 or 1935, later becoming high-ranking commanders or officers and leaving their mark on the concentration camp system. We encounter some of them in Mac Buggeln’s study of slave labour in the Neuengamme complex (1939–45), in the extermination camps, as well as in Stefan Hördler’s work on the last year of the war.<sup>15</sup> These men and women developed social identities as camp guards at the then prestigious SS organization. Promotions, recognition, frustrations, shortcuts and even risk played a great role when, between March 1944 and May 1945, a staff of 40,000 SS men and female guards kept 750,000 inmates under surveillance. Despite clear instructions from the Berlin headquarters to prioritize the economic value of the captive workforce, two-thirds of the prisoners did not survive the liberation. It seems that the guards had internalized the exterminatory practices of killing by malnutrition, disease, ill-treatment, and mass violence. Their innumerable violent acts of initiative testify to a logic of efficiency (serving the institution, doing a “good job,” having a career), as well as a logic of personal benefit (enjoyment, transcendence, legitimacy to exist, etc.).

Yet when it comes to a psychological reading of Nazi violence, historians are usually cautious. Perhaps this is why, despite the vertiginous number of publications in that field, historical studies are scarce in Weisband’s bibliography. Nevertheless, a phenomenological analysis of violence, inspired by Wolfgang Sofsky’s camp sociology and Heinrich Popitz’s phenomenology of power, has gained a foothold in the historical discipline in the past two decades.<sup>16</sup> I would welcome an interdisciplinary discussion about the individual responsibility of perpetrators in terms of margins of manoeuvre, action-taking, and complicity. Indeed, historians could profit from a more psychological understanding of perpetrator actions; political scientists and psychoanalysts, in turn, would gain insight from historians. Transgressive violence is not solely about the specificity of the situation, as Weisband accurately argues, but also about the specificity of the everyday socio-cultural setting of killing, the institutional environment, and the historical moment.

## Between Men

To be sure, gender is not totally outside Weisband’s study; his most prominent case is Pauline Nyiramasuhuko, the first woman sentenced for genocide (110–116). Yet gender as a key

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never existed. Wolfgang Sofsky, *The Order of Terror. The Concentration Camp* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997).

<sup>14</sup> Christopher Dillon, *Dachau and the SS: A Schooling in Violence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>15</sup> Mac Buggeln, *Slave Labor in Nazi Concentration Camps*, trans. Paul Cohen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Sara Berger, *Experten der Vernichtung. Das T4-Reinhardt-Netzwerk in den Lagern Belzec, Sobibor und Treblinka* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2013); Stefan Hördler, *Ordnung und Inferno. Das KZ-System im letzten Kriegsjahr* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2013).

<sup>16</sup> Heinrich Popitz, *Phenomena of Power. Authority, Domination, and Violence*, trans. Gianfranco Poggi (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017). See work quoted above and Maja Suderland, *Inside Concentration Camps. Social Life at the Extremes* (London: Polity, 2013); Anna Hájková, *The Last Ghetto: An Everyday History of Theresienstadt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

framework appears most clearly in his case study on the former Yugoslavia (326–351). It bothered me that gender explicitly arises only in the context of sexual violence and rape. Gender, I would strongly emphasize, applies not only to victimized, sexually humiliated women, but also to the perpetrators. Political scientist Cynthia Enloe refreshingly admitted that she had written six books on the subject of ethnic tensions and militarism in Southeast Asia without paying any attention to the role of gender, until she realized in the 1980s that women were not the only “ghosts on the page”; she also neglected to treat “men as men.”<sup>17</sup> Gender, I would further argue, is a backbone of the analysis of violence and armed conflict, as most of the perpetrators (men and occasionally women) are (para)military combatants.

The fast-developing field of Critical Military Studies offers an innovative take on gender: Victoria Basham, in her work on the everyday geopolitics of war, pays significant attention to how gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality and social class shape war preparedness and readiness for excessive violence in liberal democratic societies.<sup>18</sup> In the process of securing democratic ideals, “our” soldiers do not simply eliminate “dangerous bodies”; American, British, or German service men (and women) are also perfectly capable of torture and excessive violence, as we have seen with Abu Ghraib. This is interesting, as Weisband’s seven examples or “prototypical vignette case studies” deal with post-colonial authoritarian states or mass dictatorships. There is of course a considerable difference in scale, yet I wonder about the relationship between human violation in armed conflict and in times of peace. What does human violation in liberal democratic armies or societies tell us about transgressive cruelty in Nazi or Cambodian camps, or in the genocidal wars in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda?

From a gender-analytical perspective, there are some consistent structural patterns when it comes to military training. Political scientist Aaron Belkin has argued that military masculinity contains an inherent contradiction: soldiers are granted the power of violence and killing, and yet are also trained to subject themselves to a military hierarchy built on (often sexual) hazing rituals, subordination, and rewards.<sup>19</sup> These men are empowered with the force of life and death at the same time as they are subjected to complete submission; it is precisely this contradictory axis of power and obedience that defines, in a very gendered way, military masculinity. To negotiate the tensions resulting from such a contradiction, Belkin claims, soldiers enact a kind of “hypermasculinity,” which often takes the form of transgressive violence and group sexual assaults.

This overstatement, or hypercorrection (Pierre Bourdieu), also fits the inner dynamic of masculinities as an extremely competitive social configuration. As historian Thomas Kühne has convincingly shown for German soldiers during World War II, and Christopher Dillon for Dachau SS men, (young) men fear the risk of being unmasked as “unmanly” and a fraud. The male-only space of the Wehrmacht relied on the symbolic othering or factual exclusion of women to enable soldiers to adopt feminine roles (cleaning and cooking during service, emotions like empathy and care) *without* necessarily undermining their manliness.<sup>20</sup> More importantly, what allowed German soldiers to be at the same time “tender and tough” (Kühne) was that military male bonding relies on the capacity to kill; here Kühne joins Aaron Belkin’s reading. Hence

<sup>17</sup> Cynthia Enloe, *Seriously! Investigating Crashes and Crises as if Women Mattered* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 22.

<sup>18</sup> Victoria Basham, “Liberal Militarism as Insecurity, Desire, and Ambivalence: Gender, Race, and the Everyday Geopolitics of War,” *Security Dialogue* 49, nos. 1–2 (2018): 32–43; Victoria Basham and Sarah Bulmer, “Critical Military Studies as Method: An Approach to Studying Gender and the Military,” in *Palgrave International Handbook of Gender and the Military*, ed., Claire Duncanson and Rachel Woodward (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 59–71.

<sup>19</sup> Aaron Belkin, *Bring Me Men: Military Masculinity and the Benign Façade of American Empire, 1898–2001* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

<sup>20</sup> Thomas Kühne, “Protean Masculinity, Hegemonic Masculinity: Soldiers in the Third Reich,” *Central European History* 51, no. 1 (2018): 390–418.



the Holocaust experiences of collective killing constituted a system of male bonding based on the “pleasure of belonging through terror.”<sup>21</sup>

In order to better describe and understand such forms of violence, it might be helpful to follow Véronique Nahoum-Grappe’s conception of cruelty, which she elaborated in her study of mass rapes in the former Yugoslavia. The French anthropologist defines cruelty as a distinct form of violence by its intensity and motivation: cruelty not only has the explicit aim of inflicting pain and suffering, but also of degrading the victim.<sup>22</sup> Like Weisband, she argues that the performative character of cruel acts lies not solely in the fact that perpetrators perform transgressions, but also that the setting attributes to the audience an active role in the spectacle. By tacitly or even reluctantly witnessing these acts, the bystanders – both fellow perpetrators and victims – offer a stage for cruelty; the more the onlookers tolerate, the more the main performers *feel entitled* to transgress taboos.

“The appetite grows with eating” (65), as Weisband astutely notes. Although I agree with him that power only insufficiently explains the perpetrator’s desire for extreme violence, cruelty can only emerge in the context of an asymmetric power relationship and a climate of homo- or heterosocial bonding. Without positioning perpetrators within a web of interpersonal and institutional power relations, we can hardly make sense of their transgressions. Violence against women, men, and children in most cases lays bare the “deadly elasticity of heterosexist”<sup>23</sup> presumptions and fantasies, while also revealing how much the compulsory “heteronormative matrix” (Judith Butler) relies on imitation and transgression. In these lived-out fantasies – Lacanian or not – there is a gender script. If gender-based violence is as much about masculinities as it is about femininities, what does macabresque violence tell us about the connections between gender, sexuality, and war? Coming back to Weisband’s Rwandan case, I wonder about the gendered-ness of Nyiramasuhuko’s mimetic desires: what does it mean when a woman orders the rape and mutilation of her own gender? How does Lacanian theory apply to this specific case of a female perpetrator?

Sexual violence is a form of violence that is highly subjective, yet also fundamentally social; perpetrators experience it distinctly differently than their victims. Sexual violence is informed by gendered ideas of body and mind, cultural norms of sexuality and aggression, as well as the forms of military organization and national politics within a particular period of history. In our research group, Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict (SVAC), we have been discussing for over ten years how gender, sexuality, mass violence, and war are interconnected.<sup>24</sup> Although we have several experts working on the war in the former Yugoslavia, we still energetically debate the question of how to grasp the complexity of the Bosnian camps: to what extent is sexual violence in armed conflict informed by gendered scripts at work in prewar societies? How is this form of violence tied to other forms of wartime violence? How can we uncover different constellations and understand the dynamics that develop between perpetrators and victims? How do postwar societies deal with sexual violence and with victims and perpetrators? In seeking to understand what power structures sexual violence serves, we fully recognize that our work is inherently political.

To conclude, I think that ultimately we can never explain “why” human violation occurs, a question Weisband’s book repeatedly poses. Outside of the context in which genocide or

<sup>21</sup> Thomas Kühne, *The Rise and Fall of Comradeship: Hitler’s Soldiers, Male Bonding and Mass Violence in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 107–214.

<sup>22</sup> Véronique Nahoum-Grappe, “L’usage politique de la cruauté: L’épuration ethnique (ex-Yougoslavie, 1991–1995),” in *De la violence*, ed. Françoise Héritier (Paris: Odile Jacob, 1996), 273–323.

<sup>23</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 68.

<sup>24</sup> International Research Groups, “Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict,” <http://warandgender.net/about/>. See also Kirsten Campbell, Regina Mühlhäuser, Gaby Zipfel, eds., *“Why Are You Doing This to Me?” Exploring the Field of Sexual Violence in Armed Conflict* (New Delhi: Zubaan, 2019).


mass violence occurs, human cruelty does not have the same logic. Historians will never fully grasp the “high” or the shame and pain that violent action can provoke in the body and mind of the perpetrator, as this would necessitate a participant observation which would make us researchers perpetrators ourselves, or at least bystanders enabling violence. In a sense we struggle with what Saul Friedländer accurately conceptualized as “the limits of representation.”<sup>25</sup> Therefore, part of me remains skeptical of psychological typologies and generalizations, as human action is, by definition, multifaceted and highly contradictory, depending on circumstances and contingency. Yet, in the end, the micro-analytical, bottom-up perspective and zoom-technique that I adopt is quite compatible with Weisband’s synthesizing, overwhelmingly theory-based and psychological approach. We both agree that the study of perpetrators’ actions requires “methodological latitude attuned to the recursive dynamics between interior and exterior dimensions of individual and group behaviors” (99). Here I see a great opportunity to launch an interdisciplinary discussion that takes into consideration space, bodies, and mind and that explores, in a self-reflective exercise, our own positionality as researchers.

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## Notes on Contributor

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<sup>25</sup> Saul Friedländer, ed., *Probing the Limits of Representation. Nazism and the “Final Solution”* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).